NPDB-HIPDB
DATA BANK NEWS

National Practitioner Data Bank—Healthcare Integrity and Protection Data Bank

JULY 2004

Ensure IQRS Security

There are over 17,000 registered entities with an average of three users per entity who access the Data Banks. Because of the high volume of users and sensitivity of information, the Data Banks require that entities take specific precautions to protect the confidentiality of information. Implementation of these specific measures can help prevent security breaches, which may result in civil suits and fines for violating Federal regulations under Title IV of Public Law 99-660, the *Health Care Quality Improvement Act of 1986*, Section 1128E of the *Social Security Act*, and other Federal statutes. To view Data Bank laws and regulations, see *www.npdb-hipdb.com/legislation.html*.

The Federal regulations specify Data Bank requirements for the confidential receipt, storage, and disclosure of information. Entity administrators are responsible for monitoring and controlling user access, which will help ensure the security of Data Bank information.

It is important to follow the best practices discussed in this article for creating secure passwords as well as entity users' access to the Data Banks. Equally important to the system's security is the proper and secure retrieval, handling, and disposal of sensitive Data Bank information.

1. INTEGRATED QUERYING AND REPORTING SERVICE (IQRS) SECURITY

The IQRS operates on a secure web server using the latest technology and implementation measures to provide a secure environment for querying, reporting, storing, and retrieving information.

2. DATA BANK CONFIDENTIALITY

Information reported to the Data Banks is considered confidential and may not be disclosed except as specified in the NPDB and HIPDB regulations.

To safeguard the system, the Data Banks require all entity accounts to

have User IDs and User Passwords. This rule helps protect the confidentiality of Data Bank information. Each registered entity is assigned a Data Bank Identification Number (DBID), User ID, and User Password to be used by the administrator for that DBID account. Each user for the entity's account will have a unique User ID and User Password. When logging in to the system, you must enter your

Inside this issue:

New Brochure Shows Practitioners How to Perform Self-Query

The Data Banks recently created an instructional brochure entitled *The Practitioner's Guide to the Data Banks*. The brochure provides information about the Data Banks and shows practitioners, in step-by-step detail, how to perform a self-query.

Entities: Please reference the brochure when instructing practitioners how to obtain a self-query.

Call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732 to obtain copies of this brochure, or direct practitioners to the Portable Document Format (PDF) version of the brochure, available for downloading and printing on-line at *www.npdb-hipdb.com/welcomesq.html*.

Got Questions?
www.npdb-hipdb.com Has Answers!

The NPDB-HIPDB web site offers Data Bank users information on everything from regulations and guidebooks to step-by-step instructions for submitting a query or report. Please explore our web site and see what information the various links offer.

The home page provides up-to-date information on the latest Integrated Querying Reporting Service (IQRS) features, Data Bank updates, and administrative announcements. Bookmark the home page and check it regularly to find out what's new with the Data Banks.

As shown in Figure 1, the information on the home page is divided into three sections (from left to right):

• On the far left side, information resources are organized into six major categories, with links to details regarding Data Bank guidance, policy, and procedures.

• In the center section, important Data Bank Messages and announcements are posted.

• On the far right side, picture icons comprise a Quick List to direct the user to various Data Bank services as well as interactive Data Bank training.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

The six major categories on the left side of the home page are titled:
1) About the Data Banks,
2) General Information, 3) Using the IQRS, 4) Publications,
5) Legislation and Policies,
and 6) Statistical Information.
Click a topic under a heading to find detailed information and

additional links to printable fact sheets, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and on-line forms.

If you are an IQRS user, be sure to review the topics listed under General Information and Using the IQRS. In addition, every user needs to view and print the two guidebooks, which are available under the Publications heading. The guidebooks provide policy guidance and answers to commonly asked questions about the Data Banks and the IQRS. Numerous fact sheets are also available and cover general Data Bank topics, such as: Authorized Submitters and Authorized Agents; Querying; Reporting; and specific IQRS procedures, such as Creating and Maintaining a Subject Database, Downloading a Query Response Through the IQRS, and

Importing Subject Data into the IQRS. The most recent Data Bank quarterly newsletter, *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News,* as well as archived newsletters, can be viewed and printed from the home page under the Publications heading.

DATA BANK MESSAGES

In the center of the home page, the Messages section displays up-to-the-minute information about IQRS issues and important announcements. Users should be sure to check this section often.

QUICK LIST

On the far right side of the home page is the Quick List. Picture icons under
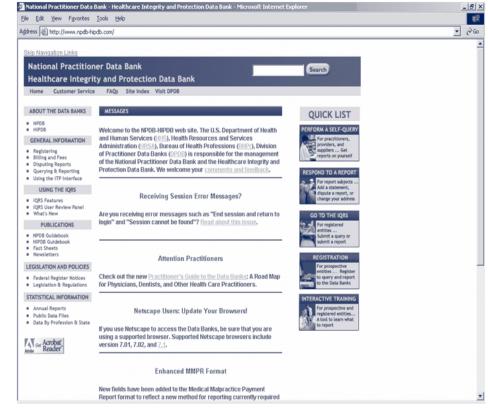
Figure 1. On the NPDB-HIPDB home page, entities can find answers to a variety of questions.

the Quick List section describe IQRS features available to entities and practitioners. Click the appropriate picture icon to access that feature.

- **Perform a Self-Query** accesses detailed information on how a subject can obtain a copy of all his or her reports (if any) in the Data Bank(s).

- **Respond to a Report** allows subjects to add a statement to their reports, place a report in disputed status, or update their mailing address.

- **Go to the IQRS** enables registered entities to reach the IQRS *Login* page. This is where registered users will be able to log in and submit queries and/or reports, view and print query results or reports, maintain their subject database, or perform a variety of other IQRS functions.

- **Registration** leads prospective entities or agents through the process of registering with the Data Bank(s).

- **Interactive Training** is a valuable resource for users to learn more about Data Bank policy and the reporting process in everyday situations. The interactive program lets you learn at your own pace. Be sure to check out the helpful information available by clicking this link.

The bottom of the home page lists the current browser versions that are supported by the web site. If you have difficulty accessing web site features, please make sure your computer uses a currently supported Internet Explorer or Netscape Communicator browser version. ⚕

Dear Data Banks...

Dear Data Banks answers questions you may have about Data Bank policy and procedures. If you have a question about how the Data Banks work, please write to Dear Data Banks at P.O. Box 10832, Chantilly, VA 20153-0832 or e-mail your question to Dear Data Banks at *npdb-hipdb@sra.com*. We look forward to hearing from you!

Question: On the *Subjects Queried* screen, I see that 0 reports were found in the # of NPDB/HIPDB Reports section of the screen. When I click the Subject Name link to view the query results, Section C reads: "Based on the subject identification information provided by you in Section B above, a search of the NPDB (or HIPDB) has located the following 0 reports." What exactly does this mean?

Answer: At the time you submitted the query, the Data Banks found no active reports on file regarding the named subject of the query.

Question: What are your rules regarding obtaining consent and release of information from the practitioner before querying the NPDB-HIPDB?

Answer: A registered entity does not need permission from the practitioner before querying the Data Banks. By law, hospitals must submit a query on a practitioner that applies for privileges or medical staff membership, or wishes to add or expand privileges. A registered hospital must also query every two years on any practitioner who holds privileges or membership on the medical staff. A registered entity may query at any time in conjunction with professional review activity.

Question: A physician applying for appointment provided my entity with information about his claims history. When I compared that information to the results of our employment and privileging query, I could not find the Medical Malpractice Payment Report (MMPR) from the insurance company that the physician says settled a claim on his behalf. What should I do?

Answer: As the querying entity, you should discuss the matter with the applicant and the insurer for clarification. There are three reasons why this situation might occur. If the medical malpractice payment was made prior to the opening of the NPDB in 1990, it would not have been reported in the NPDB. Second, although the physician might have been involved in the case, if no payment was made for his benefit, no report should have been filed. Third, practitioners must also be named in both the claim and the settlement or judgment to be reported.

If you conclude that there should have been a report in the NPDB which you did not receive, please alert us to this fact by calling the Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732. We want to be sure the Data Banks contain all the reports they should contain.

If you have any questions, please call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732. Information Specialists are available to speak with you weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (5:30 p.m. on Fridays) Eastern Time. The Customer Service Center is closed on all Federal holidays. ⚕

Recent IQRS Improvements

HISTORICAL QUERY AND REPORT SUMMARY: SEARCH FOR PAST REPORTS AND QUERIES WITHIN A SPECIFIED DATE RANGE

This new functionality (called the historical query and report summary) lets you immediately review past report and query information (individuals and organizations) submitted by your entity. To access the historical query and report summary function, log in to the IQRS, click **Continue** on the *Entity Registration Confirmation* screen, and then click **View Historical Queries** (or **View Historical Reports**) on the *Options* screen. Follow the instructions on the *Historical Query Selection* screen (or the *Historical Report Selection* screen - see Figure 2) to see what this new feature has to offer!
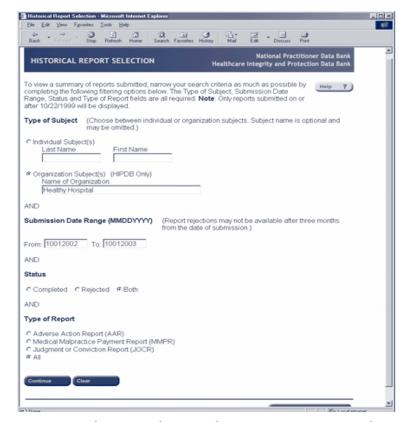
Figure 2. On the Historical Report Selection screen, you can now obtain historical report history from the IQRS.

Helpful Hints From

SELECT FIELD OF LICENSURE AND SPECIALTY CODES FOR PHYSICIAN/DENTIST QUERIES
Remember to include a Specialty (along with the Occupation/Field of Licensure) for queries submitted on physicians and dentists. If you submit a query on any other type of practitioner, you must leave the Specialty field blank.

SUBJECT DATABASE: ALWAYS CLICK "VALIDATE WITHOUT STORING" AND USE CAUTION WHEN SELECTING "DELETE ALL"
When preparing to store subjects to your subject database in the IQRS, be sure to click the **Validate Without Storing** button. This confirms whether the data you are storing is valid, complete, and ready to be used in queries. If the information is incomplete, a prompt displays a list of information that needs to be included or corrected before the subject information will be considered valid and complete. If you have

made changes to subject information, click the **Validate Without Storing** button again. If no further prompts are displayed, you can then click **Store** to save the subject information.

If you do not validate the subject information, it may be stored as incomplete. The incomplete information will appear in your subject database, but the subject will not be available for querying until the missing or incomplete information is added and stored. If you have any questions regarding this helpful IQRS feature, please see the *Fact Sheet on Creating and Maintaining a Subject Database*, which can be found on the NPDB-HIPDB home page at *www.npdb-hipdb.com*.

The **Delete All** option allows entities to delete all of the subjects maintained in their IQRS database at one time. Once deleted, the subjects are removed from the IQRS database and may not be restored without re-entering,

MODIFY YOUR SETTINGS FOR MULTI-NAME QUERY RESPONSE

Bundling query responses can make it easier for you to view or print the results of large multi-name queries. To specify your multi-name query response setting, complete the Query Response Preference section of the *User Account Information* screen (available by logging in to the IQRS and clicking **Update User Accounts** on the *Options* screen).

The on-screen options available are:

• Never bundle query responses (a query response will be returned for each subject).

• Always bundle query responses (a query response will contain all subjects bundled together).

• Only bundle query responses when querying on more than ___ (number of subjects you specify) subjects.

For example, if the blank number threshold (number of subjects you specify) is set to 10 and a multi-name query is on ten subjects, then the system will generate ten response files, one file per subject. However, if the query is on 11 or more subjects, then the system will generate one response file with all 11 of the subjects bundled together.

We hope you will take advantage of these two new beneficial IQRS features! ⚕

The Data Banks

validating, and saving subject information to your subject database. Make sure that you really want to delete all of your subjects before selecting this feature.

INTERNAL REPORT REFERENCE FIELD
An Internal Report Reference field is now available for reporters on the *Report Input* form. This optional field allows entities to post an internal file number or claim number for their own use. The ability to internally track and reference subject reports submitted to the Data Banks is a feature that was requested by Data Bank reporters at various User Review Panel (URP) meetings.

DEADLINES FOR SUBMITTING REPORTS
• Medical Malpractice payers must submit reports within 30 calendar days of the date a payment was made.

• State licensure boards must submit reports within 30 calendar days of the date the adverse licensure action became a formal, final action.

• Hospitals, other health care entities, and professional societies must submit reports within 15 calendar days of the date of an adverse action.

• As prompted by the IQRS, malpractice insurers, hospitals, health care entities, and professional societies must also print a copy of each report submitted to the NPDB and mail it to the appropriate State licensing board for its use.

IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS
When submitting reports to the Data Banks, please remember that you are required to provide a narrative description with sufficient detail to describe clearly the circumstances that led to the action or surrender. Do not reference any personal identifying information about patients, other health care practitioners, plaintiffs, and/or witnesses (e.g., names). To change a narrative description in a report, you must submit a correction to that report. ⚕

Data Banks Focus on Outreach: Recent and Upcoming Meetings

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION MEDICAL STAFF SERVICES (MAMSS) 25TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE APRIL 22-23, 2004

The MAMSS 25th Annual Conference was held April 22-23, 2004, in Novi, Michigan. The conference included educational sessions designed to meet the educational, networking, and resource needs of MAMSS members. For the first time at the conference, the Data Banks presented a focus session entitled "NPDB-HIPDB: Data You Can Bank On," providing information on legal reporting and querying requirements for each Data Bank, the various types of reports maintained in the Data Banks, and the value of voluntary querying. Conference attendees appreciated the involvement of the Data Banks. The Data Banks also exhibited at this conference and held an Integrated Querying and Reporting Service (IQRS) User Review Panel (URP) meeting. For more information on the IQRS URP meeting, see the IQRS URP Meetings section of this article.

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION MEDICAL STAFF SERVICES (CAMSS) ANNUAL EDUCATION FORUM MAY 10-14, 2004

The CAMSS Annual Education Forum was held May 10-14, 2004, in San Diego, California. The Data Banks participated for the first time at the CAMSS conference by presenting and sponsoring an information display booth. Data Bank staff also made an educational presentation to CAMSS members. Conference attendees provided positive feedback regarding the NPDB-HIPDB web site and gathered Data Bank publications, including recent issues of *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News* and the new *Practitioner's Guide to the Data Banks* brochure, to distribute to their staff.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION MEDICAL STAFF SERVICES (NAMSS) 28TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 18-22, 2004

The upcoming NAMSS 28th Annual Conference will be held on September 18-22, 2004, in Miami Beach, Florida. The conference will feature prominent speakers, educational workshops, networking with peers, and an exhibition hall with displays by key industry vendors. The Data Banks will host an information display booth at the conference, in addition to conducting a presentation on the Data Banks.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE (NCQA) EFFECTIVE CREDENTIALING WORKSHOP APRIL 1-2, 2004

The NCQA effective credentialing workshop was held April 1-2, 2004 in Orlando, Florida. The Data Banks presented and conducted a breakout session to assist attendees in understanding the role of the NPDB and HIPDB in credentialing. The Data Banks have extended outreach through participation in the last three NCQA effective credentialing workshops.

IQRS URP MEETINGS

The IQRS URP was established as a forum where NPDB and HIPDB users convene to share ideas about past, present, and future Data Banks operations. The objective of the meetings is to ensure that the IQRS remains a valuable and user-friendly system. Feedback from these meetings has frequently resulted in the implementation of recommendations from IQRS URP participants.

The URP last met on April 21, 2004, in Novi, Michigan, in conjunction with the MAMSS 25th Annual Conference. Agenda items discussed at this meeting included the following 2004 IQRS improvements: Medical Malpractice Payment Report (MMPR) enhancements based on Center for Health Policy Studies (CHPS) recommendations; Interface Control Document Transfer Program (ITP) file format improvements; and a way to resolve subject database duplicates. When importing subjects or adding subjects to a subject database, the Data Banks now inform the submitter of potential duplicate subjects and prompt the user to resolve any potential duplicate subjects.

The next IQRS URP meeting will be in the form of a workshop and is tentatively scheduled for October 19, 2004, in the Washington, D.C. area. Space is limited, and registration will be conducted on a first-come first-served basis. If you are interested in attending the fall workshop, please contact the NPDB-HIPDB Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732.

NPDB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING: MAY 11, 2004

A meeting of the NPDB Executive Committee was held on Tuesday, May 11, 2004, in Arlington, Virginia.

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The Committee was established to provide guidance to the NPDB contractor, SRA International, Inc. Agenda items discussed at this meeting included:

• A discussion of residents and medical malpractice claims.

• There was discussion of how to privilege and monitor, where necessary, practitioners who are using newly acquired skills.

• The results of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ASCI) survey: Queriers and reporters rated the NPDB highly on the ASCI uniform, cross-industry index of private and public sector customer satisfaction. On a scale of 1 to 100, NPDB queriers (3,479 respondents) gave the NPDB an overall Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) score of 78. On the same scale, 1,675 surveyed NPDB reporters gave the NPDB an overall CSI score of 76. The NPDB score ranks among the highest Federal agency scores, except for those agencies involved in the direct provision of benefits.

In addition to these agenda items, the Division of Practitioner Data Banks (DPDB) and SRA delivered status reports on NPDB operations. DPDB reported on two notable upcoming system improvements:

• Effective July 1, 2004, self-queriers will be assessed a fee of $8.00 for each Data Bank. The fee was reduced from $10.00 per Data Bank.

• Effective December 13, 2004, queriers will receive more concise query response documents. This change is based on popular user request to change the "zero reports found" query response from a three-page output document to a one-page document.

The Executive Committee is composed of representatives of major NPDB constituents, including:

• American Association of Dental Examiners.

• American Association of Health Plans.

• AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons).

• American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists.

• American College of Surgeons.

• American Dental Association.

• American Health Lawyers Association.

• American Hospital Association.

• American Insurance Association.

• American Nurses Association.

• American Osteopathic Association.

• American Medical Association.

• Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

• Council of Medical Specialty Societies.

• Department of Defense.

• Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Inspector General.

• Department of Veterans Affairs.

• DPDB.

• Federation of State Medical Boards.

• Health Resources & Services Administration.

• Horty, Springer, and Mattern.

• Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations.

• The Medical Protective Company.

• National Association Medical Staff Services.

• National Committee for Quality Assurance.

• National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

• National Practitioner Data Bank/SRA.

• Physician Insurers Association of America.

• Public Citizen Health Research Group.

• Risk Management Foundation of the Harvard Medical Institutions.

Other organizations with an interest in the NPDB also sent representatives to observe the meeting.

The next NPDB Executive Committee meeting will take place on November 16, 2004, in Arlington, Virginia.

password and other information to identify yourself to the Data Banks as an authorized user and, based on your entity's statutory authority and eligibility, you are granted the correct permissions to use the IQRS.

Please keep the following bulleted items in mind when using the IQRS:

- The entity's administrator and the entity user will be held responsible if someone gains access to a user account without the entity's knowledge and misuses the information. The best step in securing your account is a good password. See the "Formulate a Secure Password" section of this article for password specifics.

- The entity's administrator is responsible for maintaining the entity's account and the individual user accounts.

Note to Interface Control Document Transfer Program (ITP) users: When accessing the ITP, ensure that no one has access to your computer and account information.

3. ENTITY ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

For purposes of the IQRS, the "administrator" is the person who is responsible for use of the IQRS at your entity and for setting up individual user accounts. If more than one person in your organization submits queries and/or reports to the Data Banks, the entity administrator must establish individual user accounts. The administrator should not under any circumstance provide other users with the administrator's login or password. To establish user accounts, the administrator should log in to the IQRS, click **Administrator Options** on the *Entity Registration Confirmation* screen. Then, click **Maintain User Accounts** on the *Administrator Options* screen. On the *Maintain User Account* screen, the administrator may add, edit, or delete individual user accounts and specify a User ID and Temporary User Password for each user account

established. See below for information on password security.

4. PASSWORDS

All users will be required to change their passwords every 180 days. If a user leaves the organization, the administrator must be sure to delete that person's user account. If a user forgets his or her password or is locked out, the administrator is responsible for assigning a new "temporary" password to the user. If the administrator forgets his or her password or gets locked out, the administrator must call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732 to receive a new "temporary" password. All "temporary" passwords must be changed on the first use to ensure that only the authorized user has the password.

5. FORMULATE A SECURE PASSWORD

Here are some tips for creating a secure password:

- Do not make your passwords easy to decipher. Do not use any form (as-is, reversed, capitalized, etc.) of your entity name, your name, the names of family members, your birthday, or NPDB.

- Use mixed-case passwords. User IDs and User Passwords are case sensitive and must contain at least eight (but no more than 14) alphanumeric characters (they must contain at least one number).

- User Passwords (<u>not</u> User IDs) may also include any of the following special characters!@#$^&*( )-_=+[ ] { } | ;:,.< >?.

- Pick a phrase or question and use the first letter of each word, inserting a special character or two. For example, "Will It Rain Today?" could produce "W+i+r+t?04" as a password.

- Make up nonsense words that are pronounceable, such as "bingzing3"

or "zorpgorp11". Combine two short words with a special character, like "4truck+in" or "my2birds".

6. TIPS FOR MAINTAINING PASSWORD CONFIDENTIALITY

- Do not write down your password; remember it.

- Try to change your password at least every 90 days (the system will automatically prompt you to change your password every 180 days). When you change your password, the system will ensure that it is different from your previous four passwords.

7. WHEN SECURITY IS COMPROMISED

Consider the following scenario: An entity's administrator shares his or her User ID and User Password with another user. That user accesses the Data Banks (using the administrator's log-on information) and, at the illegitimate request of a practitioner, voids all active reports previously filed by the entity on the practitioner. In this scenario, both the practitioner and the user are liable and subject to penalty under Civil Money Penalties (42 CFR Ch. V) and penalties under other Federal statutes. However, because the user entered the entity administrator's login and password to perform the illicit void transaction, <u>the transaction will be traced to the administrator</u>. Avoid potentially disastrous situations by not sharing your login and password information.

8. OTHER SECURITY POINTERS

- Be sure to log out of the IQRS at the end of your session, so that unauthorized personnel cannot gain access to your sensitive information.

- After logging in to the IQRS, on the *Entity Registration Confirmation* screen, verify the date and time when your account was last accessed. If you notice that this date and

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time are incorrect, you should change your password immediately, call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732, and notify your entity administrator.

• Remember that improper use of Data Bank information can result in a civil money penalty of up to $11,000 per violation of confidentiality. By setting up passwords and using the system properly, you can help ensure IQRS security.

• Do not share Data Bank reports with anyone who is not authorized to see them. Handle the reports properly – do not leave them out on printers or lying around the office. Securely store and file reports.

• After a Data Bank report is generated, print it and then immediately secure your files. Be sure to shred extra copies of reports that you do not intend to file.

The Data Banks have an ongoing effort to scrutinize and increase security, so please look for additional articles on this topic in future issues of *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News.*

On the Horizon

NEW REPORT FIELD: INDIVIDUAL TAXPAYER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (ITIN)

Beginning this September, Data Bank users will notice a new field on query screens and HIPDB reports: the Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) issues an ITIN to individuals who are required to have a U.S. Taxpayer Identification Number but who do not have, and are not eligible to obtain, a Social Security Number. If you have an ITIN (nine-digit) number for a practitioner, please provide it in the appropriate field on queries and reports.

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